

# Ardern tackles hard issues

Leader defends KiwiBuild and surplus at first Labour conference in Dunedin in 30 years

**Audrey Young** political editor

It was Jacinda Ardern's first speech to a Labour Party conference as leader and Prime Minister. The public queued around the block to get into the Dunedin Town Hall but hundreds were turned away.

She said it was hard to describe the journey since becoming leader seven weeks before the last election but "frenetic, fascinating, fulfilling" came to mind.

As she announced new funding for 600 dedicated registered teachers to support children with complex learning needs, she read a letter she had received from an aunt of a boy with special needs. It said: "We as a whānau have tried with dead ends wherever we turn so I then turn to you Prime Minister and plead for your help, he is missing out on so much and it just isn't fair. Please help us find a solution for this young boy who deserves the best chance living with autism."

Ardern: "So today I want to say to parents, to kids, to teachers, to aunties, to anyone who has asked for more support for those with additional needs – we've heard you."

Ardern also went somewhat on the defensive over two issues which have been criticised by the left – the KiwiBuild programme, which helps the middle class into home ownership, and the surpluses the Government is running.



Jacinda Ardern and deputy Kelvin Davis (rear left) greet delegates after the Labour conference. Inset: The PM's baby Neve wears a Labour-red knitted hat.

Photo / Otago Daily Times, Audrey Young (inset)

On KiwiBuild she said it was helping thousands of young families into a home "not through a subsidy but the Government using our scale and buying power to do what the market hasn't".

And again aimed firmly at criticism by the left, she quoted what iconic Labour leader Michael Joseph Savage said when state house tenants were moving into a new home: "We are

trying to cater for everyone... we do not claim perfection, but we do claim a considerable advance on what has been done in the past."

She also defended the big surpluses. "The surplus is a safety net. Nobody knows what's around the corner."

Much of the conference was closed to the media, including a session dubbed Question Time in which delegates asked ministers questions, and another session

featuring the Māori Caucus.

A small group of 1080 protesters chanted outside the conference but were not audible from inside.

It has been 30 years since a Labour conference was held in Dunedin. Cheese rolls, a southern classic, were served for afternoon tea.

Ardern spoke briefly on Friday night and then greeted her baby, Neve, in the foyer afterwards by putting a Labour-red knitted hat on her head.

## Unity shown after NZ First minister battles to get in

**Audrey Young** **comment**

It was just as well New Zealand First minister Tracey Martin was in Dunedin for the Labour Party conference.

It was a reminder that Labour didn't win the last election but was chosen to lead the Government by NZ First. That was of little matter at the start of the conference, which was as much a celebration about its new-found unity as it was being in government.

Famous for its factional infighting, Labour appears to be going through a period of unity – a perception enhanced by the fact the media was shut out of any part of the conference in which delegates expressed opinions.

It is hardly the behaviour of a party that claims to be part of the

most open Government we've seen.

But there was no doubting the Labour mood. The scarves and hats were brightest of reds, the smiles wide and the cheese rolls abundant.

And Jacinda Ardern herself made a special mention of Winston Peters and NZ First a couple of times in her speech yesterday, as well as the Greens who were represented in the audience by co-leader Marama Davidson.

There was also some recognition of MMP politics in one of the constitutional remits that was passed (behind closed doors).

For many years, the constitution had said the party manifesto was binding. It can't be, though, when the party agrees to park policy during coalition negotiations.

So the manifest is no longer binding and coalition agreements

will have to be approved by the New Zealand Council as soon as possible after the announcement of a government. That reflected reality, as Ardern said.

Ardern was introduced by her partner, Clarke Gayford, who played MC with the ease of the professional broadcaster he is: "It says my very next job is to introduce someone known here as the Prime Minister of New Zealand. You might know her as that, whereas I just know her as someone who is falling behind when it comes to her turn to unload the dishwasher... Jacinda."

Ardern clearly has had enough of big build-ups. She received that at the conference opening on Friday night from Cabinet minister David Parker, who pulled together some of the most flattering international reviews she has had, including "international

feminist icon" (*Irish Independent*).

Parker had to leave the conference early for a trip to China but not before hosting about 10 ambassadors and other diplomats who had trekked to Dunedin to see success first-hand.

Tracey Martin was originally turned away by a Labour volunteer vetting arrivals, having turned up to the Dunedin Town Hall without a Labour Party lanyard. Martin was there as Associate Education Minister with responsibility for the subject of Ardern's speech, 600 new support staff in schools for complex learning needs.

It was not essential that Martin be there but it was a gesture of unity in the coalition and that will be a much more important factor to "winning" a second term than the current harmony in Labour.

## School fined \$56k but opposes identification

**Sam Hurley**

The director of a private training school has escaped a criminal conviction, but the school has been fined \$56,000 over the unapproved enrolment of international students and making false representations online.

But the identities of the man and school remain secret after appeals were lodged in the High Court on Friday.

Last week, Judge Brooke Gibson's reserved decision was released to the *Herald* after a sentencing hearing in the Auckland District Court in July.

The director and the unregistered private training establishment pleaded guilty at the trial, on March 12 this year, to 33 charges – 16 for the

director and 17 for the school – over Education Act breaches.

The charges, brought by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) in 2016, were for unapproved enrolment of international students and false representations that the school had consent to assess against certain unit standards. As an example, it charged fees for a student enrolled in a dog-grooming course for accounting-based unit standards.

The school also claimed its courses were NZQA-approved and included unauthorised usage of protected terms such as "New Zealand" to describe its courses. As well, an advert on its website read "accredited NZ qualifications from \$25 per week". It ran online courses and also used

websites in Europe and Australia.

"There was a clear false misrepresentation in the material published on the website," Judge Gibson said in his decision. "Anyone reading the website would have been led to believe the [school] was offering an approved training scheme."

The school's website also said it let students enrol in courses without requiring details of their New Zealand residency, citizenship or visas.

Court documents obtained by the *Herald* showed in July 2016 a prospective student asked the school if NZQA approved its courses. Replying in an online chat, a school employee said "many courses are NZQA approved". None had such approval. The school's breaches also in-

cluded enrolling at least 34 students into its small-business accounting course and offering the educational business unit standards without NZQA permission.

Judge Gibson said the director's "culpability is essentially based on his carelessness". The company was convicted on each charge and fined \$56,000. It was also ordered to pay court costs of \$2210. While discharged without conviction, the director must pay \$24,000 towards NZQA costs.

NZQA is appealing the decision to discharge the director without a conviction.

An application for permanent name suppression for the director and school was refused, and that decision is being appealed.

### Trio collapse

Three people are recovering in hospital after collapsing outside a central Auckland supermarket, reportedly after using synthetic cannabis. The trio were rushed to Auckland City Hospital from outside Countdown on Victoria St shortly after 3pm yesterday. A St John Ambulance spokesperson said the patients had collapsed. According to police, the three people appeared to have been affected by synthetics. One person had been taken to the emergency department. The other two people were now conscious.

### Test to save lives

A new diagnostic test being developed by a Kiwi biochemist could help save the lives of pregnant women and their babies. Pre-eclampsia is a life-threatening condition for both mother and child that occurs in around 5 per cent of pregnancies, and often requires early delivery of the baby. Dr Jennifer Crowther, a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Canterbury, said it remained one of the leading causes of maternal and foetal disease and death worldwide. A key indication of pre-eclampsia was higher levels of a specific protein in the mother's blood. A test being developed by Crowther would quantify the level of that protein in the mother's blood, to identify individuals at risk of developing the condition. Crowther was recently awarded \$100,000 from the Canterbury Medical Research Foundation to carry out her research.

### Pest-free zone

More than a dozen groups have joined forces to create a 115,000 hectare pest-free zone on the edge of the country's second-largest city. Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage yesterday launched the "milestone agreement" to make Banks Peninsula/Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū in Canterbury pest free by 2050. The announcement comes just days after Sage launched a project to establish a 310,000ha predator-free "mainland island" in the centre of the South Island.

### Body found

Police believe they have found the body of a Hamilton dad missing since last Monday. Christopher Huxtable, 35, had been missing since Monday afternoon when he was supposed to pick his daughter up from school but did not show up. Waikato police yesterday said they found a body on Saturday night near Mt Pirongia believed to be Huxtable. "There are no suspicious circumstances and the matter has been referred to the Coroner," police said.

### Correction

Clive Mortimer Jones was not buried at Romeries Communal Cemetery Extension near Le Quesnoy, as a photo caption in Friday's *Herald* indicated. The Rev Mortimer Jones returned to New Zealand, to his parish of St Andrews in Cambridge.

## Lotto

Draw no 1800 **01 07 22 23 29 36** Bonus **18**

| Division   | Amount       | Winners |
|------------|--------------|---------|
| Division 1 | \$200,000    | 5       |
| Division 2 | \$17,952     | 14      |
| Division 3 | \$530        | 470     |
| Division 4 | \$51         | 1132    |
| Division 5 | \$28         | 17,966  |
| Division 6 | \$20         | 24,602  |
| Division 7 | Bonus Ticket | 231,433 |

|                            |              |        |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------|
| <b>Strike: 36 07 23 22</b> |              |        |
| Division 1                 | Rollover     | 0      |
| Division 2                 | \$763        | 50     |
| Division 3                 | \$66         | 3243   |
| Division 4                 | Bonus Ticket | 81,739 |

|                   |           |        |
|-------------------|-----------|--------|
| <b>Powerball:</b> | <b>02</b> |        |
| Division 1        | Rollover  | 0      |
| Division 2        | \$15,300  | 1      |
| Division 3        | \$523     | 31     |
| Division 4        | \$48      | 79     |
| Division 5        | \$28      | 1129   |
| Division 6        | \$17      | 1668   |
| Division 7        | \$15      | 16,129 |